

There She Goes

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Summary: After a bitter confrontation with him over Faith, Buffy leaves a despondent, brooding Angel to contemplate what's left of their relationship.

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> Author's note: All right, this is my first tentative attempt at an "Angel" fanfic. This particular vignette takes place shortly after Buffy and Angel's showdown over Faith. Buffy has bitterly returned to Sunnydale, leaving a despondent, brooding Angel to contemplate what's left of their relationship. A note to the WB execs: Angel, Buffy, Cordelia, Wesley, Jenny Calendar, Sunnydale, and any other related characters or places do not belong to me. I'm merely borrowing them for my own amusement, and for the sake of entertaining others.

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> There She Goes...
 By Sarie

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> "You're, like, two hundred and forty something, and you don't even get a senior citizen's discount. Do you know how much money you could save us on office supplies and groceries?" The brunette spitfire rambled off her list of complaints, flipping through a recent pile of bills and receipts. "And you know what really sucks? There's no way to prove that you're older than dirt!" She tossed one of the slips of paper over her shoulder, with a roll of her eyes. "That one's totally Wesley's. Personal business cards and engraved pens that read 'Rogue Demon Hunter Extraordinaire' are so not in this agency's budget."

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> His chic secretary let loose an exaggerated sigh, looking up from her calculator to peer expectantly at her employer. "I know you're

gonna hate this idea, seeing how you're into 'saving the world for free' and all, but we could totally solve most of these money problems if we upped our rates ever-so-slightly." Noting his disapproving frown, Cordelia quickly summoned her defenses. "Hey, don't look at me like that. I'm not talking about robbing the blind and taking food from little kid's mouths or anything. I'm just saying we might charge a teeny bit more from the people who can really afford it."

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> "No, Cordelia." And with that brief, monotone utterance, the matter was settled.

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> However, Cordelia Chase was far from through. "It's not asking too much, Angel," She chided, self-righteously. "You give so much to these people, so what's the big deal asking for a little something back?"

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> "It is a big deal," the vampire replied moodily. "These people have their cups overflowing with troubles, not money. Our services aren't just for the wealthy."

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> "Hey now!" She protested abruptly, "That's not fair, I'm just trying to put bread and blood on the table here. We have to look out for ourselves too, and sometimes that calls for sacrifices..." She moved to hunt through a box of donuts, making a face at the apparently poor selection. "What, no bear claws?"

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> "Exactly." Angel gazed steadily at the pink pastry box, his expression dull and listless. "If we cut back on our own unnecessary luxuries, we wouldn't need to raise the rates."

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> "What?" Cordelia was aghast, a scowl registering on her perfect features. "What luxuries?" She questioned indignantly, gesturing at the room around them. "Hello, have you seen our office? This place needs a major overhaul, it's so dark and dirty-and it looks like it belongs to..." She cut herself off, allowing the sentence to linger in the air, unfinished.

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> "Like it belongs to a vampire." He completed the thought for her, his pale face void of expression.

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> She made a face, but quickly recovered her composure. "Sorry. But I'm just telling you like it is. You know, from the customer's standpoint. "

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> "Right," He wasn't agreeing with her, not even acknowledging her argument. It was merely a way of closing the subject.

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> There was a moment of awkward silence as Angel returned to his contemplative melancholy, leaving his friend to observe him doubtfully. It was common knowledge to everyone within his circle, that Angel wasn't exactly a sunny tempered creature of darkness. He was tortured with a guilt-ridden sobriety that forced him to shoulder the sins of his days as a demon. When you got right down to it, he was glum, forlorn, and pathetically enough, Cordelia noted, still crushing on Buffy. Yet despite all of his moodiness, he was still her friend, and sometimes she thought she might have to knock him over the head to get him to realize that not every evil in existence was his fault. And if all of that angst-riddled grief wasn't bad enough everyday, today he was worse than usual.

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> "Look, I'm going out to do some shopping," she began tentatively, pulling her fashionable leather bag over one shoulder. "You need anything?"

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> "No, I'm fine. Thank you."

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> "You sure?" She inquired again, eager to make amends. "A movie? A newspaper? Maybe a couple pints of blood, because I think you're running low. The butcher's right down the street from here."

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> "Cordelia," he repeated wearily. "I'm fine."

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 "If you say so," she accepted, uncertainly. "Be back later."

Then, as if having a sudden change of heart, she pivoted around to face him again, freshly exasperated. "You know, Angel, if this pout-fest is about Buffy..." That got his attention. He had torn his gaze away from the floor, and was now staring blankly at her. "Then I think that's really lame," she continued tersely. "You did what you thought you needed to do, even though you were obviously out of your gourd when you did it. But if Buffy's wiggled over you helping that mental-case Faith, then she's probably just jealous. So let it go, because it was your deal. And it's about time someone let Buffy know the earth doesn't revolve around her." With that spoken, Cordelia turned on her heel and swept out the door.

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> Oblivious to her exit, Angel sunk back in the armchair, caught in a torrent of brooding. It was not an uncommon episode for Angel, who was haunted by moments of self-loathing every waking second. Cursed by recollections of a past that would remain branded in his mind like hellfire. Ghostly memories that would not be dismissed as a fleeting nightmare, more ghastly crimes than he could ever atone for.

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> Yet, this pensive reminiscence was apart from the others. Rather than the usual remorseful angst, it was more of a musing, the sort of wonderment one experiences after leading a long and curious life. And curious proved a most apt term for Angel's two hundred and forty some years, most of which spent as a member of the living dead. Ironically enough, what often plagued his thoughts wasn't all of the bizarre occurrences he had witnessed or the sadistic plots he had foiled. It was who he had encountered them with, the people he had loved and lost along the way. The human and otherworldly creatures that had left their mark on him, shaping the path of his destiny and at the same time, stealing away a shadowy recess of his heart. He kept them there, however painful or despicable their memory; carried them along for the ride. His victims, his friends, lovers, and enemies alike. They all served as a poignant reminder of what he was-of what he had been-and what he must never be again.

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> Angel's mind drifted back to the realm of the unavoidable, a subject he visited only in his most dark and impassioned states. One he allowed himself to frequent less and less often. Buffy. A wound that refused to be healed; an aching sense of longing he couldn't shut off. God, he loved her. And now after the storm of harsh words they had exchanged, she probably hated him.

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> It had always been a hopeless situation, though neither of them was

at fault for its failure. Fate had deemed their love impossible, fruitless. But what else could be expected from such an irony: a vampire slayer in love with a vampire. Buffy's omniscient watcher, Giles, had once described their complicated relationship as 'poetic', but Angel wasn't so sure. Poetic was an idyllic phrase reserved for happily ever after, for fairy tales. Nothing about Angel's life was poetic, not even before the change. And the dark period Angel had spent tormenting the slayer's friends and ruthlessly betraying her trust was anything but poetic. It was twisted irony. Arguably, it wasn't directly his fault. Neither he, nor Buffy could have guessed the consequences of their ill-advised liaison. He certainly never thought that the sense of completion he found with Buffy would cost him his soul. But it had, and even still there were nights when Angel woke up in a cold sweat, the nightmare of a deathly limp Ms. Calendar or Buffy's anguished tears fresh in his mind.

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> He had never bothered to assume that their love would last forever, but then, he had never dared to imagine its demise. It had come though, he knew that now, and he was most likely the one who had instigated it. He had left the brave young slayer one misty night, standing alone beside what tatters were left of her high school graduation, for lonely solitude in LA. His logic had him convinced that she would be better off without his presence in Sunnydale, that her life deserved to be less complicated. At the time, Angel had believed the difficult decision was in their best interests. That, in order to honor the love he felt for her, he would have to let her go. He prayed everyday that he was right.

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> But it seemed once more that fate would prove him wrong. Every meeting following his departure had been disastrous, each incident leaving him and Buffy on a sour note. She was still confused and angry with him, torn between her new tumultuous life at college, and the desire to retreat back to the past. The slayer had recently returned to LA for the sole purpose of tracking down her long time rival Faith, her quest eventually leading to a furious confrontation with Angel. Though her petite frame boasted of effortless grace and charm, Buffy proved to be a worthy opponent and an even fiercer enemy when she felt threatened. She'd handed Angel his ass numerous times before when she was pissed off, and so it really came as no surprise when she punched him for defending someone she considered unforgivable. But what he would never forget, was the look on her face when he had retaliated, smacking her in return. Her clear, brown eyes wide with disbelief and... hurt. And through those deep orbs, he could make out his own startled reflection as well.

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> Angel winced, the recollection of it all overwhelming him. He might have tried to restrain her, attempted again to explain his intentions with Faith. He could have stood in stoic silence, allowing her to take out her frustrations on him, however unfair it was. But, no. He had struck her, had sent her stumbling backwards with the sweep of his fist. Their gazes mirrored each other, communicating the mutual shock.

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> "I'm sorry... I'm sorry." It had been a useless apology. No words spoken could have ever mended the tear in their friendship. The strain of separation and conflicting lifestyles had officially taken its toll, and before that unfortunate evening was through, much worse would come between them.

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> "I have someone in my life now." The cool indifference of her words

haunted him still. "Someone that I love. It's not what you and I had; it's very new. You know what makes it new?" Words that cut through him like shards of glass. "I trust him. I know him." Whoever he was, Angel despised him with his entire being. Hated the guy for robbing the heart of the one he had always treasured above all else.

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> He had been momentarily speechless after that, too struck with jealousy to speak. And finally when he had found his voice and the petulance to back it up with, he drove home the final blow. "You don't know me anymore, so don't come down here with your great new life and expect me to do things your way! Go home."

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> Had it been worth all of the hurt; the renewal of old pains for both he and Buffy? Yes. By aiding Faith he had saved another soul, come one step closer to redeeming himself and following his destiny. He had helped to rescue her from the darkness that was stealing over her, by showing her another way to rebuild the shattered pieces of her life. Through the light of truth, she had finally seen the evil that had been blinding her for so long. Faith, the renegade slayer who cared for nothing and for no one, had given herself up to the authorities in an attempt at repentance. So why did he feel so miserable?

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> Angel released a discomfited sigh, suddenly aware of the fact that reliving the experience would not serve any advantageous purpose. The past was over and done with, and Buffy was part of that. There was no use tormenting himself over what couldn't be altered. Still downhearted, he abandoned the solace of the armchair and slowly got to his feet. In a few hours it would be dusk, and a sleepless LA would soon be infested with those wishing to wreak harm and havoc. He would rest until then, reenergize his mind and body in order to be ready for them. Ready to protect a city that still needed him.

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> It was already growing dark when he awoke, the last glimpse of sunset melting rapidly off the horizon. He donned his customary black duster jacket, and headed towards the weapon cabinet to select his artillery for the night. As he strode through the office, something caught his attention. On one of the end tables sat an envelope, clearly the over-sized kind reserved for greeting cards. It was addressed to him.

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> With a pang of curiosity he reached for it, carefully tearing open the envelope. Inside was a bright yellow card that simply read, in bold black print, "Get over it." Arching a brow, he flipped it open to see the hand scrawled note inside.

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> "Angel, so you're having issues. What's the big? Everyone has them, and you have to face them sooner or later. So learn to deal and you can move on. Besides, there's always more important things to worry about. Like me.

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 Love, Cordelia

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 P.S. There's a couple pints in the fridge for you. You're welcome."

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> A ghost of a smile traced its way across his lips, and he found himself chuckling aloud. It was a rumbling, pleasant sound he hadn't been acquainted with for some time now. With a slight, thin-lipped grin, he placed the card back in the envelope, marveling at his secretary's odd choice of counsel. It was harsh, but she was right. Whether Cordelia knew it or not, she was making more sense than she ever had. Almost too much sense, it was eerie. He did need to move on. Maybe Buffy didn't have to be one of his 'issues'. It was a disservice to the feelings they had once shared to resent her, and if he could clear his conscience of what ill had gone on between them, then he would be able to return to his sworn duty. With no regrets.

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> "Learn to deal," he repeated aloud to himself, as if in mantra. There needed to be closure here. Perhaps he would pay Buffy a visit.

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> The End

> Liked it? Detested it? Questions or comments? Don't hesitate to mail me at SarieGirl11@aol.com

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